

## Grantee Spotlight

In this section, we feature interviews with some of our grantee organizations' directors and key staff members, who share their thoughts on their work and the particular fields they're involved in.

### An Interview with Marcy Whitebook of UC Berkeley's Center for the Study of Child Care Employment



In April 2006, the Stone Foundation awarded a grant to the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at UC Berkeley to develop an Interdisciplinary Master's degree program in Early Childhood Development, and this past spring, awarded a second grant to the Center to begin to plan a multi-year policy research project to identify effective models of early childhood teacher preparation and how those programs can be leveraged to create systems change.

Marcy Whitebook, Ph.D., is the Executive Director of the Center, which she established in 1999 for research focusing on issues of employment in settings for young children, the relationship between good jobs and the quality of services available to children and families, and appropriate and accessible professional preparation for teachers. Marcy has led several large-scale early childhood research projects, including the landmark National Child Care Staffing Study, which first brought public attention to the low wages and high turnover of child care teachers. She co-developed the Early Childhood Mentor Program in California, now operating in 68 colleges throughout the state, and CARES, a program to encourage professional development and retention of early care and education practitioners, now underway in counties throughout California.

#### ***How did you get into the field of early childhood development?***

From as early as I can remember, I loved being with young children. I babysat and volunteered at Head Start when I was in high school. I got engaged in the Women's Movement when I was in college in the late sixties, and came to understand the connection between the increase in women entering the workforce and the need for reliable, high quality child care services. As was true of many in my generation, I identified as an activist and I saw that child care was in need of greater resources and social value, especially if it was to fulfill its potential on behalf of low-income families. I decided to pursue a graduate degree in early childhood development, excited that I could merge my passion for children and social change.

#### ***Why have you concentrated your efforts on employment and workforce issues in the early childhood development field?***

I didn't realize when I started in the field in the 70s that I would wind up spending my entire career working on such a challenging issue. I was teaching and I wanted to specialize in infant mental health. But I was shocked by the wages paid to early childhood teachers. I thought because society recognized the need for mothers to work outside the home, people would quickly grasp the importance of a skilled and stable early childhood workforce. I was wrong. At the time, the assumption was that if you had a college education, you could "do better" than to work with young children, and we are still struggling against attitudes that suggest that work with young children requires minimal professional development.

I am a part of a generation that saw so much change, in part due to our own activism around civil rights, women's roles and the Vietnam War. So I sought out and found like-minded early childhood teachers who believed that if you educated the public about the low status and poor wages in the field, the fix would be quickly forthcoming. We started by surveying 100 child care workers in San Francisco, and published a study that generated national interest among teachers, but not policy makers or even leaders in our field. Our next step was to make the connection between the adult work environment and the quality of services. Joining with researchers at the University of Virginia and UCLA, we conducted the *National Child Care Staffing Study* in the late 1980s, which documented the links among low wages, high turnover, inadequate

training and poor-quality child care and detrimental experiences for children. Those findings enabled us to finally generate concern about these issues more broadly in the field and with the public and policy makers.

***How have the issues in workforce development changed since you first started working in the field?***

When I started working on the issue of compensation for early childhood workers, it was considered radical and, by some, inappropriate. At one national conference, a prominent leader in the field stood up after I made a presentation, and refuted my contention that teachers should advocate for themselves, suggesting that better compensation would follow if they just did their jobs well. On another occasion, I was taken to lunch by two well-respected field elders and told to “drop the issue of worker pay.” They were worried that better pay would lead to higher costs for parents, and believed that if teachers were truly committed they would and should make the economic sacrifice.

In the 1990s things began to change. Turnover soared, recruitment suffered, and the mediocre quality of most services generated great concern. The issue of worker compensation became a central concern for directors, trainers, and policymakers, not just teachers. We launched the Worthy Wage Campaign, which also broke the silence about these issues. Nowadays, though some people want to ignore workforce issues, nobody would admonish others for speaking out about them.

***Since one of the biggest problems is compensation, do you see any movement or progress in that area?***

There are some early childhood teachers who are now getting parity with kindergarten and other elementary teachers, and they tend to be working in the state-funded preschools. Initiatives like CARES and T.E.A.C.H.<sup>TM</sup> (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) have made formal education much more accessible to workers across various settings. But compensation is still mostly generated by parent fees, and/or limited public dollars. As a result, the majority of people in early child care still suffer from low wages.

***These days, what are some of the biggest challenges in preparing the workforce?***

Actually, *keeping* the people you’ve prepared is one of the biggest challenges, because better opportunities open up once they have obtained more education. The return on their investment in their education through their service in early childhood classrooms is low. Another challenge is how to build a linguistically and culturally diverse leadership in the field. The field is diverse, but still very stratified. But the biggest challenge is this: Deep down in their bones, most people don’t really understand what this work is, what it takes to do it, and why people in early childhood development need to be better compensated. The idea that you need to educate and compensate early childhood workers as much as K-12 teachers just hasn’t sunk in with the public yet, in large measure because there still is ambivalence about early childhood education as a social good, worthy of more generous public investment.

***Do you see an increased understanding on the part of policymakers and the public about the importance of the ECD workforce?***

Absolutely. I think the commitment on the part of various governors, presidential candidates and business leaders is fabulous. Still, the discussion is mostly focused on providing preschool, while too many people still think of child care in a custodial way and not enough about quality. Our infants and toddlers need better services, too!

***Is there more networking and communication among people working in the ECD employment field than in prior years? Do you see any changes?***

Yes, I can still remember life pre-email and fax machines. There is much more communication today, and it is far easier to learn about efforts in other communities. Still, because the field is so mind-numbingly complex, it is often the case that people working in the field really don’t know where to turn for help with accessing training or advocating for better support.

***What kinds of projects are you working on these days?***

We are working on several issues related to teacher preparation and leadership. We are convening conversations throughout California to gather input about new early childhood educator competencies (what teachers and leaders need to know about, and know how to do) that can serve as the cornerstone for remodeling our professional development system. We also continue to work on compensation issues, now

turning to what new federal policy might be possible after the 2008 election. Absent better compensation, so many of our efforts with professional development will fall short of their goals. With support from the Stone Foundation, we will also be exploring the most effective ways to prepare teachers to master those competencies. This partially involves working with institutions of higher education to revamp their courses of study to address issues such as teaching children whose home language is not English, and learning how to create inclusive classrooms for children with different abilities. At the same time, we are working to develop more upper division and graduate programs and to guarantee access so that we can have the culturally and linguistically diverse leadership the field needs. We are exploring how to improve access to professional development opportunities and help people to succeed in pursuing higher education. Also, with support from the Stone Foundation, I am working on a "curriculum" to seed the field with the next generation of leaders, particularly around issues of policy, politics and power.

***What are the best ways for private and family foundations to leverage their money in early childhood development? Any mistakes you have seen foundations make?***

Much of my support over the last 25 years has come from foundations, and I have witnessed a great deal of change during this time. I have seen funders join together, which has helped to leverage resources, and I have also seen foundations get more engaged in providing leadership in the field. Several foundations over the years have taken a leap of faith, supporting new directions for the field, and I will be forever grateful to them for taking that risk and allowing positive new initiatives to emerge. Foundations have the power to take an untested strategy and put it on the map, which is really an important function. Foundations can also be fickle and say, "Okay, we've done that for a while—let's move on to another area." It's important to stay with an issue or a strategy long enough sometimes to see progress. Nonprofit ventures really scramble to keep afloat year to year and often aren't sustainable without longer-term support. It's important for people at foundations to really understand the lives and contexts of nonprofits, which is something that Sandra Treacy and others on staff do. Sadly, this isn't true for all foundations.

***If you could recommend one book to read to understand early childhood development, what would it be?***

*From Neurons to Neighborhoods* provides a comprehensive overview of the science of early childhood development. The book is a good foundation for anybody interested in these issues. *Eager to Learn* is another book I would recommend, especially for those interested in teachers.

Visit the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment on the web at

<http://www.iir.berkeley.edu/cscce>.